Speech from the Throne 2007

Delivered on the Occasion of the Opening of

The First Session of the Twenty Sixth Legislature Province of Saskatchewan

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Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan

SECURING THE FUTURE

MR. SPEAKER, MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE, HONOURED GUESTS, PEOPLE OF SASKATCHEWAN:

It's time to get to work.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the opening session of the Twenty Sixth Legislature of the Province of Saskatchewan.

On November 7, the people of Saskatchewan chose a new direction for our great province; a direction that reflects Saskatchewan values.

Growth and opportunity.

Security and compassion.

Keeping your word.

This is what my new government will stand for. This is what the session will be about.

This Speech from the Throne will be shorter than most. This is not because there is any shortage of work to do. It will be shorter because my government believes actions speak louder than words.

This afternoon, I will outline the actions that my government will take during this session and its vision for securing Saskatchewan's future.

However, before I go on to articulate this new vision, it is only appropriate to pause now and recognize the service of the previous administration.

Members of the previous Government of Saskatchewan worked hard to serve the public. While this chamber often rang with debates and disagreements over policies and priorities, there was never any doubt that members of the previous government were motivated by their desire to make our province a better place for all.

On behalf of my government and the people of Saskatchewan, I sincerely thank them for their service.

SECURING THE FUTURE

Within the borders of Saskatchewan, one can find natural resources and economic potential that would be the envy of any sovereign state on our planet.

Saskatchewan is also blessed with amazing human resources, hard working people and a history of innovation and excellence.

Given this, Saskatchewan should be a leader – not only in the New West that is emerging around us – but in the world. This brings me to the crux of my government's new approach.

My government will have a growth agenda.

Despite our tremendous wealth in both natural and human resources, our province has never truly achieved its full potential.

Today in Saskatchewan, there is a clear sense this is about to change. There is a clear sense that our time is now.

A growing population and a growing economy are the keys to securing our future.

This will mean more opportunities for everyone. This will mean more young people choosing to stay in Saskatchewan.

It also means more revenue to pay for essential public services – health care for those who are sick, education for those who wish to improve their opportunities in life, safer highways, safer communities, and a helping hand to those who struggle with problems like addictions.

Growth is not an end in itself. The end we truly desire is a safer, better and more secure life for the people of Saskatchewan.

That's why growth and security will be the watchwords for my government in the months and years ahead.

They will be the twin paths for our journey – a journey which will never truly be completed, because we must

always seek to grow, and we must always seek to provide a better, more secure life for all Saskatchewan people.

GROWTH

Accountability

My government and its growth agenda will be built on a foundation of sound financial management. That is why my government will introduce ***The Saskatchewan Growth and Financial Security Act***.

This Act will require that the budget of this province be balanced each and every year, instead of every four years as current legislation dictates. This new act will also set out a formula for allocating budgetary surpluses – half to **securing** the future by paying down debt, and half to **investing** in the future through economic growth initiatives. ***The Saskatchewan Growth and Financial Security Act*** will also ensure the size of the public service will not grow at a rate faster than the population it serves.

Retaining Our Young People

Accelerating growth will require a long-term commitment to keep our young people in Saskatchewan.

In the last seven years, our province has lost more than 35,000 people through out-migration. Most were young and well-trained. Instead of building careers and starting families right here at home, they decided to move elsewhere. We need to keep more of our young people in Saskatchewan.

To that end, my government will introduce the nation's most aggressive youth retention plan. This plan calls for **tuition rebates of up to $20,000 over seven years for those students who stay in the province after graduation to start their careers.**

My government will also help young people start a business in Saskatchewan by allowing young **entrepreneurs under 30 to earn $10,000 per year tax free for five years**.

A New Vision for the Economy: Enterprise Saskatchewan

Key to my government's plans for creating lasting and permanent growth is the establishment of ***Enterprise Saskatchewan***. For too long in this province, governments of all political stripes have attempted to dominate the economy at the expense of the private and cooperative sectors. This has inevitably led to important investment decisions being viewed through the lens of political expediency.

Enterprise Saskatchewan will be a unique and innovative public-private partnership designed to replace the top-down, government-driven economic schemes of the past. It will return direction of the economy to the hands of people who create the jobs, invest the dollars and build the labour force of the future. It will be tasked with the ongoing development of – and reporting on – economic goals and targets. ***Enterprise Saskatchewan*** will ensure we remain a competitive and attractive home for investment and job creation.

Supporting Municipalities

The people of Saskatchewan voted in favour of a government committed to restoring a relationship of trust among the province, cities and municipalities.

During a period of fiscal strain, grants to various municipal governments were cut and expenses down-loaded. Now that times have improved, little has been done to restore the previous balance.

My government is committed to negotiating a **new revenue sharing agreement with municipalities** that will include a percentage of the province's own-source revenue. My government will also pursue innovative new partnerships with municipalities to assist them in meeting the demand for commercial and residential lots as part of our plan to secure the current economic momentum. While new agreements are being negotiated, my government will **increase revenue sharing to provide immediate assistance to municipalities.**

Democratic Labour Laws

The goal of promoting growth requires my government to focus some attention on the current labour legislative environment. The rights of workers to bargain collectively and the rights of employers must be respected. However, the labour legislative environment must also be competitive with other Canadian jurisdictions, if the Saskatchewan economy is to realize its potential.

My government will **introduce legislation that achieves this competitive balance in labour laws.**

Labour Shortage

Addressing Saskatchewan's current labour shortage is key to securing the future. Solving this shortage requires much greater participation by our First Nations and Métis people, more aggressive immigration efforts, and a concerted effort to bring our ex-patriots back home.

These areas will form the backbone of my government's efforts to deal with the shortage of trained workers. Enterprise Saskatchewan can be a focal point for these efforts, bringing together stakeholders in the economy—including post-secondary institutions—to focus attention on this important priority.

Investing in Knowledge, Innovation and Post-Secondary Institutions

The people of Saskatchewan have voted in favour of a government committed to building a knowledge economy in Saskatchewan.

In addition to the efforts of Enterprise Saskatchewan, this goal will be achieved through increased funding to existing post-secondary institutions.

My government will increase operating funding to post-secondary institutions by $125 million over four years.

A knowledge economy must also look for new ways to capitalize on the province's natural advantages. One example is the uranium sector.

For too long in our province, development of the value added opportunities flowing from Saskatchewan's plentiful and high grade uranium reserves have not been a sufficient priority. This is why my government will now begin systematically exploring these opportunities.

Agriculture

If it is to be successful, any growth agenda in Saskatchewan must pay particular attention to agriculture, historically the backbone of our economy.

My government is committed to **fully funding the province's share of the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Program** (CAIS) and is determined to work with the federal government on creating new programs.

There is also a need for the federal government to increase its share of funding for income stabilization and disaster relief programs.

The Ministry of Agriculture is aware of the difficulties now facing the industry as a result of a higher Canadian dollar and is already working to develop solutions.

My government will listen to producer groups, and, in cooperation with the federal government, find ways to work through a difficult transitional period.

Forestry

Despite problems on a global scale, the forestry sector presents this province with significant opportunities for growth. Possibilities include developing new markets, examining creative uses for wood waste and assisting in the construction of new infrastructure, vital to the industry's future success.

Enterprise Saskatchewan will play a key role in this area. However, any new plans will not include direct government investment in specific companies, a course of action that has proven disastrous in the past, leading to some of the largest losses of taxpayers' money in the province's history.

Tax Relief

The people of Saskatchewan have also voted for lower taxes.

My government is committed to **reducing the education portion of property taxes by doubling rebates over the next four years.** It is the first step in making good on a commitment to achieve a better balance in paying for our education system.

My government's plan applies to both farmland and urban dwellings. Everyone has a stake in the future of our educational system. Everyone is entitled to reap the benefits from adjustments to that system.

Saskatchewan families purchasing a used car or light truck are already benefiting from tax reduction measures introduced by my government**. The provincial sales tax now applies only once to the purchase of a vehicle**.

Tourism and Parks

Saskatchewan is a land of great natural beauty that is a source of pride for its people. And that pride encourages us to enthusiastically share these remarkable treasures each year with visitors from around the world.

Much can be done to improve the services offered to these visitors and build even more pride in our province. To that end, my government will **double tourism funding** to promote added marketing activities and make important capital investments in new tourism facilities.

Our parks have also been a consistent source of pride and quality recreational activities for Saskatchewan families. My government will **invest in new electrified campsites and new infrastructure for our parks.**

SECURITY

The measures I have cited so far will do much to increase growth and economic activity in Saskatchewan. However, as previously mentioned, this growth is not an end in itself. The end that we all desire is a higher quality of life and a safer, more secure environment for everyone in Saskatchewan.

This will require improvements to our health care system, safer communities and improvements to the social safety net. My government plans to take significant steps in each of these areas.

Health Care

The people of Saskatchewan have voted for better health care.

There is overwhelming support for a publicly funded, publicly administered health care system. However, patients are growing tired of over-flowing emergency rooms, shortages of doctors and nurses, endless temporary rural hospital closures and the longest waiting lists in the nation.

Key to overcoming these difficulties is addressing the shortage of nurses, doctors and other health care professionals. My government will begin working in partnership with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses and other nursing stakeholders. The goal will be to **hire 800 Registered Nurses** within the first term of government.

My government is also committed to **creating more training seats and more residency positions** for our doctors.

Saskatchewan people believe that not enough of the health care budget is getting to the front lines of patient care. Increasingly, people wonder if we have the most effective system possible.

My government is committed to conducting a **"patient first" review of the entire health care system**. This review will be conducted with the input and support of health care professionals across our province. This review will determine the most efficient means of reducing surgical wait times, creating quality workplaces, reducing shortages of doctors and nurses through a comprehensive human resources plan and strengthening support for cancer care and prevention.

My government will also honour a promise to establish a **prescription drug program that covers most seniors**

and includes children under its protective umbrella. This drug plan can be distinguished from others proposed recently, in that it is both comprehensive and fiscally responsible.

Healthy, Active Families

Numerous studies have shown that children who are involved in positive activities early in life are more likely to have positive outcomes in later life. They are also likely to avoid problems like drug addiction and alcohol abuse.

In order to assist families with the cost of cultural, artistic and sports activities, my government will introduce a **$150 per year per child Active Families Benefit. The Active Families Benefit will apply to each child aged six to 14 years**.

Safer Communities

The people of Saskatchewan have voted for safer communities.

For the past nine years, Saskatchewan has had the highest crime rates in the country. Our people suffer the highest rate of substance abuse in the nation, according to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

More than ninety percent of our prison inmates have a substance abuse problem and more than half of them are released from jail, only to end up behind bars again.

What has been tried in the past clearly isn't working. It is time for a new approach.

My government will work with communities on a new long-term policing strategy that identifies current and emerging needs. It will move to provide another **120 new police officers over four years.**

We will work to crack down on drugs and gangs in prisons.

The crucial work of funding **100 new long-term addictions treatment beds** will also begin. To the extent that is possible and practical, my government will

work towards having these treatment beds operated by community based and First Nations organizations.

The Social Safety Net

The people of Saskatchewan voted in favour of helping families in need.

My government is deeply committed to reducing child poverty. Everyone in this province must have the chance to secure their full measure of the coming prosperity.

The ***Report Card on Child Poverty in Saskatchewan*** released one year ago by the University of Regina, showed that 20 percent of children lived below the poverty line. That's more than 43,000 children. Over the past few years, this province has recorded poverty rates higher than the national average.

This must change.

My government will provide **more funds for school lunch and anti-hunger programs** across Saskatchewan. It will work with the thousands of community based organizations in the province that are already working effectively on the front lines in the drive to provide services to the poor and the hungry.

My government will **also provide an additional $20 million over four years to community based organizations** that provide employment skills training to those individuals who need extra assistance to reach their full potential in the workforce. This assistance is also an important component in my government's efforts to solve Saskatchewan's labour shortage.

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE—THE OVER-ARCHING GOAL

The people of Saskatchewan know their province can perform as well as or better than any other jurisdiction in Canada. They know Saskatchewan has the opportunity to attract a flood of new investment and turn the current boom into a lasting prosperity. With that prosperity will come an added measure of security for Saskatchewan people. The result will be a higher quality of life.

The Environment

My government is committed to finding solutions to the environmental problems facing our province, our country and our planet. The recent record has not been good. This province has the highest rate of growth in greenhouse gas emissions in Canada. For the sake of our children, this must change.

This is why my government is committed **to meeting Saskatchewan's existing greenhouse gas emission target of reducing levels by 32 percent by 2020.** In addition, in negotiations with the federal government or other provinces, my government will continue to insist that carbon offsets or penalties imposed on heavy greenhouse gas emitters will stay in this province. This money will be earmarked for research into environmental technology.

In addition to emissions targets, help will be provided to homeowners, schools, hospitals and businesses wishing to go green. Through the Crowns, which will remain publicly owned, assistance will be provided for the cost of installing geothermal and solar heating.

My government is committed to protecting and conserving our natural resources. In addition to clean air, the people of Saskatchewan must have access to clean drinking water, abundant and diverse wildlife and pristine lakes for recreational use.

Governments must also lead by example. This is why my government will ensure that new vehicles it purchases are either hybrid or high fuel efficiency vehicles.

Through Saskatchewan Government Insurance, my government will also help drivers wishing to purchase a hybrid or high efficiency vehicle by lowering the cost of registering these vehicles.

Education

Over the next four years, my government will invest in childcare, early childhood learning and other development initiatives.

Operating funding for K-12 education will be increased by 20 percent over four years and the foundation operating grant provided to school boards will be reviewed to ensure the current system is fair to all.

The strength and continued vibrancy of rural Saskatchewan depends on a strong, locally-controlled education system. My government will examine revising the Education Act to improve the consultation and assessment process before significant changes are made to school facilities. The potential for future economic growth and the necessity of having schools within a reasonable distance of all students must be rigourously assessed, prior to any changes.

My government understands that the future of our province depends on our education system. It realizes that the solution to the long-standing property tax issue can be found in funding education from general revenue.

Quality of Life for First Nations and Métis

The people of Saskatchewan owe a profound debt of gratitude to Saskatchewan's First Peoples for the help they provided our pioneers in building this province.

Treaty education is an important part of forging new ties. There must be an appreciation in the minds of the general public that Treaties are living, breathing documents that continue to bind us to promises made generations ago. This is why my government is committed to **making mandatory instruction in history and content of the Treaties in the K-12 curriculum.**

My government will work with First Nations and Métis to develop a protocol for protecting their rights and interests by ensuring that the duty to consult and accommodate is fully honoured. First Nations and Métis must also play a vital role in Enterprise Saskatchewan since they must be full partners in planning for future growth.

Keeping Our Word

Some may say that this Throne Speech sounds a lot like my government's election platform.

They're right.

During the election campaign, my government clearly outlined what it would do.

Now, the time has come to do what was said.

All of these changes will not happen overnight. But they will happen over the course of the next four years. Then, Saskatchewan people will have the opportunity to judge whether my government has kept its word.

The date of that judgement will be November 7, 2011—exactly four years to the day from the last election.

In order to ensure that date and to eliminate any political game-playing in the setting of an election date, my government will introduce legislation to establish a **fixed election date every four years in November.**

CONCLUSION

On the night of November 7, my new government received many congratulatory messages. One was an email from Mr. Kent Heinrich. The message included the following quotation from Joseph Addison, an English essayist, poet and politician.

"If you wish success in life, make perseverance your bosom friend, experience your wise counsellor, caution your elder brother and hope your guardian genius."

There was much talk in the recent election about hope.

Today in our province, we truly are on the verge of something great.

We can secure for generations to come lasting economic growth.

My government's vision is one where Saskatchewan takes its rightful place as a leader in Canada.

There is new determination in the eyes and new confidence in the step of people all across our province.

This is not some land of meek and timid souls, peeking

nervously into an uncertain future with trembling apprehension.

This is Saskatchewan, full of confident, self-assured yet humble people—ready to step boldly into a bright future, no longer willing to settle for mediocrity.

Our Saskatchewan is truly a land of hope.

May divine providence continue to bless our province and guide this Assembly in all of its deliberations.

God bless Saskatchewan.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.